

Soldiers *Online*

JROTC Teaching

Story by SGT Ed Passino Photos by Paul Disney

Trust

SABRINA Clarke looked around for the familiar face of a team member as she tried to bridge an obstacle with a wooden plank so her team could transport materials to their next objective.

Just as it seemed that her attempt at crossing the simulated river would fail, Akiele Nurse snagged the board and secured it to his side of the crossing before it could plunge into the water.

Nurse, a sophomore at Farmont High School in Maryland, enjoys basketball and computer games. Clarke, on the other hand, is a sophomore from Woodbridge, Va., and spends her free time reading or on the Internet.

Two very different people, Clarke and Nurse were among more than 630 area high school students who spent part of their vacations in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps summer camp at Fort A.P. Hill, Va., learning trust and teamwork.

The camp, established in the late 1980s as a summer activity for young teenagers in the District of Columbia, has evolved to include schools from Virginia, Maryland and the District, said retired MAJ Levi Bowman, who has been the camp's public affairs officer for the last 11 years.

SGT Ed Passino is a staff writer for the Fort Belvoir, Va., Eagle.



SSG Dan Nelson of the Military District of Washington Engineer Company orders a whole platoon of cadets to drop for push-ups.



and Teamwork



SGT Joseph Balvanz talks cadet Reggie Williams through the final preparations for his first rappel.



Successfully completing an obstacle course helps improve the organizational skills and discipline that will benefit the cadets in both military and civilian life.

“Each year the program gets bigger, which is very good because it shows the camp is successful in what it’s trying to accomplish,” said Bowman, who is also a JROTC instructor at Anacostia High School in Washington, D.C.

The camp, which teaches young teens how to develop themselves outside of their normal environments, has succeeded because of the hard work that has gone into developing the program as the numbers have increased, Bowman said.

One important camp activity is the Leader’s Reaction Course, which has the kids leading teams of their peers and performing as part of a team.

“The course gives them a chance to take on roles that maybe they aren’t used to when around their friends,” Bowman said. “But here it allows them to get that exposure, because all these kids are doing the same things.

“At some point they all are going to be team leaders or squad leaders. It’s JROTC and, just as in the military, there are leadership, discipline and integrity issues to develop,” he said.

Camp members also had opportunities to rappel from a tower, take



Cadets negotiate a simulated minefield during a strenuous day at Fort A.P. Hill’s Leader’s Reaction Course.

“Granted this was not basic training, but it was a course designed to instill discipline. It’s the attitude they’re going to carry with them for a while.”

marksmanship training with pellet rifles, build and cross a rope bridge, and learn basic land navigation.

“The objective of the camp is to motivate teenagers to become better citizens — citizens who have the organizational skills and discipline to accomplish tasks with integrity and unity for the better of the group, not for themselves,” Bowman said as a squad of teenagers began clapping and cheering each other on as the time limit for the completion of a task neared.

“Each night we evaluate the day’s activities and identify the kids not quite making the progress we had hoped for,” said SSG Mark Williams, a rescue squad leader with the Military District of Washington Engineer Company and supervisor for the Leadership Reaction Course.

“Our MDW soldiers took part in molding these young kids,” Williams said. “We made sure some military standard of how they looked and acted was in order. If a kid acted up or had a uniform unbuttoned, we made sure it was corrected.

“Granted this was not basic training, but it was a course designed to instill discipline,” he said. “It’s the attitude they’re going to carry with them for a while.

“When the course was nearing its end, you could see the bonds these kids had made with us and with each other”, he said.

“I realized I had chosen the right camp when wake-up call was at 4:30 in the morning,” said David Acosta, a junior at Thomas Shore High School in Waldorf, Md.

“Yeah, I could have gone to a football camp, but I’m serious about joining the Marine Corps, and this has exposed me to the military way of doing things. And at 17, I’m smart enough to know the military way may not always be the most popular way of doing something, but more often than not it’s the correct way.” □